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Implementation of the Habitat Agenda and outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on this topic

Twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held at United Nations Headquarters, from 6 to 8 June 2001.

At the special session, the Assembly adopted the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, which consists of a political declaration reaffirming the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda; a review and assessment of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda; and proposals for further actions for achieving the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements.

* The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

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1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 55/195 of 20 December 2000, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-sixth session a report on the special session of the Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

2. The twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly was held at United Nations Headquarters from 6 to 8 June 2001. In addition to the meetings of the Plenary, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and the Thematic Committee, 50 special events were held during the week of the special session.

3. Two major reports prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements were launched during the week of the special session, namely, *The State of the World's Cities Report 2001*[1] and *Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements*,[2] in which the realities faced by urban populations around the world are monitored, analysed and reported.

4. The Plenary of the special session met to review and appraise the progress made and to identify further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.[3] The Plenary heard statements from two vice-presidents, five deputy prime ministers, 70 ministers, 20 vice-ministers, 53 heads of delegation, 11 governmental officials, five intergovernmental organizations, 12 non-governmental organizations and the executive heads of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and the United Nations Environment Programme. The involvement of the world of local authorities in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda was emphasized by the President of the World Associations of Local Authorities Coordination and Chairperson of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities to Habitat. Delegations elaborated on the progress made so far in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in their countries, and made suggestions on improved strategies to achieve the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements. Participants reconfirmed their commitment to the Habitat Agenda but pointed out that there was a need for more effective and innovative approaches, in particular as regards closing the gap between policy formulation and implementation. Underlined in most presentations was the need for decentralization, more balanced regional development, promotion of participatory approaches and utilization of potential public and/or private partnerships. Several representatives pointed out that the main thrust of the implementation strategy of the Habitat Agenda should be centred on poverty eradication and the promotion of social inclusion and integration in cities. Emphasized in a number of statements was the role of women in human settlements and shelter development; it was noted that, in many societies, discrimination against women continued to be a major impediment, hindering the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda and urban development policies. Several speakers stressed the important role of civil society organizations in the development of human settlements and recommended strengthening support so as to utilize fully the potential of those organizations. A large number of delegations stressed the role of international cooperation in the development of human settlements, particularly for the benefit of the least developed countries.

5. The Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole held three meetings, and heard statements by representatives of the organizations of the United Nations system, local authorities, non-governmental organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners. The Committee considered the progress made in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the draft declaration on cities and other human settlements in the new millennium which it recommended for adoption by the General Assembly.

6. The Thematic Committee discussed selected experiences in implementing the Habitat Agenda. Sixteen case studies were presented from four cluster areas: shelter and services; environmental management; urban governance; and eradication of poverty. A number of cross-cutting themes were also addressed, such as participation, partnership and cooperation, gender equity, social inclusion, scaling-up of local practice and exchange of knowledge. The Thematic Committee format was recognized as an effective and innovative way of sharing substantive experiences and one that could be adopted for similar United Nations meetings. Case studies indicated that progress was being made in many countries towards the achievement of the first goal of the Habitat Agenda, adequate shelter for all, through the improvement of existing neighbourhoods and the construction of new housing. The studies demonstrated the success and

effective application of the basic principles of the Habitat Agenda on the integrated and participatory management of the local environment. They also demonstrated that countries were seeking to improve governance of their cities and that very interesting lessons could be drawn and shared among countries from the North and the South.

7. Fifty special events were held during the week of the special session. Some of the events were independently organized by non-governmental organizations, United Nations organizations and agencies, intergovernmental agencies, the private sector and civil society. A fitting introduction to the special session was the holding of a meeting between the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the presidents of the world associations of local authorities and more than 50 mayors from all regions of the world. In the course of the event, the mayors presented the declaration adopted by the second World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities at Rio de Janeiro on 6 May 2001 in support of the Habitat Agenda and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. United Nations organizations are being encouraged to draw on the assistance of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in liaising with the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities.

8. The panel meeting on the topic "Future of city-to-city cooperation" was a very important special event held on 7 June 2001, which involved the participation of mayors and representatives of local authorities and international support organizations. Panellists reviewed the realities of city-to-city cooperation, highlighting the benefits to be attained and the obstacles to be removed. There was general agreement that city-to-city cooperation results in tangible benefits for local authorities and their citizens through the exchange of information and experience. It was also agreed to work towards the launch of a standing forum on city-to-city cooperation.

9. The Cities Alliance event, organized by the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, was held on 6 June. The Cities Alliance is one of the few international forums in which local governments participate as full and equal members with bilateral and multilateral organizations. The focus was on the conditions that are necessary to prepare city development strategies and to tackle slum upgrading, focusing in particular on the problems of legal and institutional frameworks specific to each city and country.

10. Several well-attended parallel events focusing on gender and urban governance were held throughout the week of the special session. Other substantive and important parallel events were the panel meetings on financing adequate shelter for all and on the right to adequate housing and a panel meeting on water for African cities, which was organized by the Centre and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

11. The General Assembly adopted by consensus the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium (resolution S-25/2, annex), in which Governments reaffirmed their will and commitment to implement fully the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements[4] and the Habitat Agenda and decided on further initiatives in the spirit of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

12. The outcome of the special session was the culmination of a comprehensive effort that involved a wide range of actors in the follow-up to and implementation of the consensus reached at Istanbul in 1996. The review and appraisal process showed that Member States had taken tangible steps towards incorporating the human settlements issues contained in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda into their national policies. Civil society, parliamentarians, local authorities, women and youth groups, the private sector and other actors had played an important role in the implementation of the established goals, as well as in the preparatory process for the special session. Elaborating and bringing up to date the Istanbul consensus, the Declaration on Cities and other Human Settlements in the New Millennium constitutes an important proclamation by Member States on how to improve strategies to achieve the goals of adequate shelter for all and sustainable development of human settlements.

13. The Declaration acknowledges the work of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and its two global campaigns on secure tenure and urban governance. The Global Campaign for Secure Tenure will benefit from the consensus on housing rights, that is, to develop a regular dialogue and discuss areas of collaboration in empowering the poor to undertake legislative and administrative reforms, giving women the right to inheritance and ownership of land and other

property, and preventing forced eviction. The Global Campaign on Urban Governance will benefit from the acknowledgement of the increased priority given to the principles of governance at all levels, including efforts to ensure the transparent, responsible, accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of cities and other settlements. The Declaration also acknowledges the contribution of the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities as well as the cities without slums initiative which was also supported in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The work programme of the Centre for the biennium 2002-2003 addresses the main topics highlighted in the Declaration.

14. In paragraph 66 of the Declaration, Governments endorsed the establishment of the Habitat Agenda Task Manager System which is designed to allow better monitoring and mutual reinforcement of action taken by international agencies in support of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. In its resolution 2001/22 of 26 July 2001, the Economic and Social Council invited the Secretary-General to implement, within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and in accordance with paragraph 66 of the Declaration, the establishment of the Habitat Agenda Task Manager System. The matter is currently under consideration by the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

15. The Declaration reconfirmed the role of the Commission on Human Settlements and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements in advocating, promoting, monitoring and assessing the progress made in achieving the goals of adequate shelter for all through the provision of legal security of tenure and sustainable development of human settlements in all countries. The Centre will advocate, promote, monitor and assess the progress made by combining best practices and enabling policies, and compiling legislation and plans of action for the identification of illustrative cities for the two global campaigns and further advancing the normative debate and operational action on major human settlements issues.

16. The Declaration reaffirmed the commitment of Governments to international cooperation as an essential element in the implementation of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda and requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-sixth session on options for reviewing and strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and function of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. A separate report will be submitted by the Secretary-General on this aspect after appropriate consultations and in accordance with the relevant decisions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

Notes

[1] United Nations publication (HS/619/01E).

[2] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.III.Q.1.

[3] Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.6), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[4] Ibid., annex I.